

“SPEAK, LORD!”**NO. 2526**

**A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, JULY 18, 1897
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 20, 1884**

*“Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.”
1 Samuel 3:10*

THE child Samuel was favored above all the family in which he dwelt. The Lord did not speak by night to Eli or to any of Eli’s sons. In all that house, in all the rows of rooms that were round about the tabernacle where the ark of the Lord was kept, there was not one except Samuel to whom JEHOVAH spoke.

The fact that the Lord should choose a child out of all that household, and that He should speak to him, ought to be very encouraging to you who think yourself to be the least likely to be recognized by God. Are you so young? Yet, probably, you are not younger than Samuel was at this time. Do you seem to be very insignificant? Yet you can hardly be more so than was this child of Hannah’s love.

Have you many troubles? Yet you have not more, I daresay, than rested on young Samuel, for it must have been very hard for him while so young a child to part from his dear mother, to be so soon sent away from his father’s house, and so early made to do a servant’s work, even though it was in the house of the Lord.

I have noticed how often God looks with eyes of special love upon those in a family who seem least likely to be so regarded. It was on Joseph, whom his brethren hated—it was upon the crown of the head of him who was separated from his brethren—that God’s electing love descended. Why should it not come upon you?

Perhaps, in the house where you live, you seem to be a stranger. Your foes are they of your own household. You have many sorrows and you think that waters of a full cup are wrung out to you, yet the Lord may have a very special regard for you. I invite you to hope that it is so, ay, and to come to Christ and put your soul’s trust in Him—and then I am persuaded that you will find that it is so and you will have to say—“He drew me to him with cords of a man, with bands of love. Because He loved me with everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness has he drawn me.”

Notice also that while God had a very special regard for young Samuel, He had, in that regard, designs concerning the rest of the family. God’s elect are chosen, not merely for their own sake—they are chosen for God’s name’s sake—and they are also chosen for the sake of mankind in general. The Jews were chosen that they might preserve the oracles of God for all the ages and that they might keep alight the spark of divine truth that we Gentiles might afterwards see its brightness.

And when God’s special love is fixed upon one member of a family, I take it that that one ought to say to himself or herself, “Am I not called that I may be a blessing in this family?” Young Samuel was to be God’s voice to Eli, he was chosen to that end. And in a much more pleasant way than Samuel was, I trust that you, dear friend, favored specially of God, are intended to be a messenger of better tidings than Samuel had to carry—perhaps to an aged father whose eyes are growing dim, perhaps to some brother wayward and wandering in the world, perhaps to some sister whose heart is careless about divine things.

I think the first instinct of one who has been himself called by grace, is to go and call others. When Christ appears to Mary, Mary runs to the disciples to tell them that the Lord has spoken unto her.

Samuel is chosen that he may carry the message to Eli—and let each believer feel that he is favored of God that he may take a blessing to others—“for none of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself.”

I trust that we are not like the Dead Sea which perpetually drinks in Jordan’s streams, but never gives the waters out, and therefore it becomes saltier and yet more salt—the lake of death. We are not to be receivers only, taking in the good that God sends by this means or by that, but we are to pour out as fast as He pours in, working out that which God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Our subject is to be, God speaking with us. And I trust that everyone here, who has any fear of God at all, will take the prayer of Samuel and make it his or her own—“Speak; for thy servant heareth.”

I. And first, I will speak to you upon THE SOUL DESIRING—desiring to be spoken to by God. “Speak, Lord!”

Oh, how often has our heart felt this desire in the form of a groaning that cannot be uttered! “Lord, I want to know You. You are behind a veil and I cannot come at You. I know that You are, for I see Your works, but oh, that I could get some token from Your own self, if not for my eyesight, yet at least for my heart.”

We cannot endure a dumb God. It is a very dreadful thing to have a dumb friend—a very painful thing to have a wife who never spoke with you or a husband who could never exchange a word with you, or a father or mother from whom you could never hear a single word of love—and the heart cannot bear to have a dumb God, it wants Him to speak.

For what reason does the soul desire God to speak to it? Well, first, it desires thus *to be recognized by God*. It seems to say, “Speak, Lord, just to give me a token of recognition, that I may know that I am not overlooked, that I am not flung away like a useless thing upon the world’s dust heap, that I am not left to wander like a waif and stray, a derelict upon the ocean. Oh, that I may be sure that You see me, that You have some thoughts of love concerning me! How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God! If I do not know that You think of me, I pine, I die. Speak, Lord, just to show that You do notice me. I am not worthy that You should regard me, but still speak to me, Lord, that I may know that You do observe me.”

More than that, this desire of the soul is a longing *to be called* by God. When the Lord said to the child, “Samuel, Samuel,” it was a distinct, personal call, like that which came to Mary. “The Master is come, and calleth for thee,” or that which came to another Mary when the Lord said to her, “Mary,” and she turned herself and said, “Rabboni,” that is to say, “my dear Master.”

All who have heard the Gospel preached have been called to some extent. The Word of God calls every sinner to repent and trust the Savior, but that call brings nobody to Christ unless it is accompanied by the special effectual call of the Holy Ghost. When that call is heard in the heart, then the heart responds. The general call of the Gospel is like the common “cluck” of the hen which she is always giving when her chickens are around her. But if there is any danger impending, then she gives a very peculiar call—quite different from the ordinary one—and the little chicks come running as fast as ever they can and hide for safety under her wings.

That is the call we want—God’s peculiar and effectual call to His own. And I would, if I could, put into the heart and mouth of each person now present this prayer, “Speak, Lord, speak to *me*. Call *me*. When You are calling this one and that, Lord, call *me* with the effectual call of Your Holy Spirit. Be pleased so to call me that, when I hear You saying, ‘Seek ye my face,’ my heart may say unto You, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’”

“Speak, Lord, moreover, *that I may be instructed*.” I am afraid that there are some persons who do not want to be instructed in the things of God. They are afraid of knowing too much. I know some good Christian people—good in their way—who cautiously avoid portions of Scripture that are contrary to their creed. And I know a good many more who, when they get hold of a text, stretch it a little, or squeeze it a little, to make it fit in with what they by prejudice conceive ought to be the truth. But that should not be your method or mine.

Let us say, “Speak, Lord, and say to me what You will. Whatever You have to say to me, Master, say on.” The Lord Jesus may perhaps reply to us, “I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.” Howbeit, it is for us to ask Him to lead us into all truth. If there is a truth that quarrels with you, depend upon it, there is something in you to quarrel with.

You cannot alter the truth, the simplest way is to alter yourself. It is not for us to shorten the measure, but to endeavor to come up to it. Let us lay our hearts before God and pray Him to write His truth upon them. Let us yield our understanding and every faculty that we have to the supreme sway of Jesus, and like Mary, sit down at His feet and receive His gracious words. “Speak, Lord, to instruct me. Tell me all about this and that truth which it is needful for me to know.”

We sometimes mean by this expression, “Speak, Lord, *for our guidance*.” We have got into a great difficulty. We really do not know which way the road leads—to the right or to the left—and we may go blundering on and have to come all the way back again. So we specially need the Lord to speak to us for our guidance.

It is an admirable plan to do nothing without prayer—neither to begin, nor continue, nor close anything except under divine guidance and direction. “Speak, Lord. Do give me some answer. If not by Urim and Thummim, yet by such means as You are pleased to use in these modern times, speak, Lord. For whether You point me to the right or to the left, I will go whichever way You bid me. Only let me hear Your voice behind me, saying, ‘This is the way: walk ye in it.’”

At times, also, we want the Lord’s voice *for our comfort*. When the heart is very heavy, there is no comfort for it except from the mouth of Christ by the Holy Spirit. You may hear the sweetest discourse, you may read the most precious chapters of Scripture, and yet your grief may not be assuaged, even in the least degree. But when the Lord Jesus Christ undertakes to speak to you, when the great Father opens His mouth, when the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, applies the truth to your heart, then are you filled with joy.

I do not know what particular state you may be in, but this prayer of little Samuel can be turned all sorts of ways. Are you doubtful about your interest in Christ? A great many people make fun of that verse,—

*“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?”*

If they ever find themselves where some of us have been, they will not do so any more. I believe it is a shallow experience that makes people always confident of what they are and where they are, for there are times of terrible trouble that make even the most confident child of God hardly know whether he is on his head or on his heels.

It is the mariner who has done business on great waters who, in times of unusual stress and storm, reels to and fro, and staggers like a drunken man—and is at his wits’ end. At such a time, if Jesus whispers that I am His, then the question is answered once for all—and the soul has received a token which it waves in the face of Satan so that he disappears—and the soul goes on its way rejoicing.

Do pray this prayer—“Speak, Lord.” If you will not, it shall always be my prayer. I would seek the presence of my God and cry, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say to me, Where is thy God?”

But when my heart can answer, “Here He is, He is with me,” then does my soul begin to sing at once,—

*“My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
And comfort of my nights.”*

Use the prayer of Samuel at this moment, even if you are rejoicing. And if you are beginning to wander, if you are getting heavy and dull and lukewarm, ask the Lord to speak to you so that you may be quickened out of that state, that your declining may be stopped.

“Speak, Lord.” I have known the time—and so have some of you—when one word of His has saved us from a grievous fall. A text of Scripture has stopped us when our feet had almost slipped. A precious thought has helped us when we were ready to despair and when we could not tell what to do. One word out of the inspired Book, applied to the soul by the Holy Spirit, has made a plain path before us and we have been delivered from all our difficulties.

I commend to you, then, very earnestly, the personal prayer of the soul desiring—“Speak, Lord.”

II. Now, secondly, let us think of THE LORD SPEAKING.

Suppose that the Lord does speak to us? Just think for a minute what it is. First, it is *a high honor*. Oh, to have a word from God! There cannot be any honor that comes from man that can for a moment be compared with having an audience with God, familiar conversation with the Infinite, sitting down at the feet of eternal love, and listening to the voice of infallible wisdom. The peers of the realm are not so honored when they see their Queen as you are when you see your God and He speaks with you. To be permitted to speak with Him is a delight, but to hear Him speak with us is heaven begun below.

And while it is so great an honor, we are bound to recollect that it is *a very solemn responsibility*. If any man here can say, “The Lord once spoke with me,” my brother, you are under perpetual bonds of obligation to Him. Jesus Christ spoke to Saul of Tarsus out of heaven and from that hour Paul felt himself to be the Lord’s, a consecrated man, to live and die for Him who had spoken to him. “Speak, Lord,” and when You do speak, help us to feel the condescension of Your love and yield ourselves up wholly to You, because You have spoken to us.

“Oh!” says one, “if God were to speak to me, I am sure it would make a change in me of a very wonderful kind.” It would, my friend. It would convert you, it would turn you right round, and start you in quite a new direction. Someone said to me, concerning Paul, that he had “a twist” at that time when he was going to Damascus, and everybody afterwards asked, “Is that Saul of Tarsus, the philosopher, the clever young Rabbi, the learned pupil of Gamaliel? Why, there he is, talking plainly and simply to those poor people and trying to bring them to Christ, the very Christ whom he used to hate! What has made such a change in him?”

“Oh!” they said, “he has had a strange twist. Something has happened to him which has quite altered him.” Oh, that the Lord would make something of the same kind happen to everyone here to whom it has not yet happened! This is the mainspring of a holy life, “God has spoken to me and I cannot live as I used to live.” This is the spur of an impetuous zeal, “Jesus Christ has spoken to me and I must run with diligence upon His errands.” This, I believe, comes like fire-flakes upon the spirit and sets the whole nature on a blaze. To hear God speak, to have His voice go through and through the soul involves a great responsibility, yet he who truly feels it will never wish to shirk it.

To hear God speak to us will bring to us many *a happy memory*. I appeal to those who have heard that voice before. Do you not remember, dear friends, many places where the Lord spoke to you? You have forgotten many of the sermons which you have heard, but there is one sermon you have never forgotten—perhaps there are a dozen that you can recall if you think a little.

Why do you remember them? Why, because you were in great trouble and you went into the house of prayer and the sermon seemed made on purpose for you. You said to the person who sat with you, “I am glad that I was here, for I am sure that from the opening sentence to the close, it was all for me.” Or else you were getting into a very dull and stupid state, and you went to the house of God, and there was a sermon which cut you to the very quick and woke you up. You never could go back to where you were before God spoke to you.

No, we can never forget these voices—sweet yet strong—which thrill our very soul, which wind not through the ear, and so waste half their strength, but come directly to the heart, and in the heart enshrine

themselves! Oh, yes, if God has spoken to you, your heart will dance at the memory of the many times in which He has done so!

I think I must also say that it is *a probable mercy* that God will speak to you. I know that, if you are a father, it is not improbable that you will speak to your child. And our heavenly Father will speak to His children, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is married to us, surely will not be a silent Husband, but will be willing to speak to us and to reveal His heart to us.

Only pray just now, “Speak, Lord! Speak, Lord!” and He will speak. I feel encouraged to expect that He who died for me, will speak to me. He who did not hesitate to reveal Himself in human flesh, bearing our infirmities and sorrows, surely will not hide Himself from His own flesh now. He will not be here among us according to His promise, “Lo, I am with you always,” and yet never speak to us at all. Oh, no. He waits to be gracious! Therefore, let not our prayers be restrained, but let us cry, “Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth.”

“But how does the Lord speak?” someone asks. That is a very important question. I know that He has many ways of speaking to the hearts of His people. We do not expect to hear audible words. It is not by sense that we live—not even by the sense of hearing—but by faith. We believe and so we apprehend God.

God often speaks to His children *through His works*. Are there not days when the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing and the trees of the field clap their hands, because God is speaking by them? Do you not lift up your eyes to the heavens at night and watch the stars, and seem to hear God speaking to you in the solemn silence? That man who never hears God speak through His works is, I think, hardly in a healthy state of mind. Why, the very beauty of spring with its promise, the fullness of summer, the ripeness of autumn, and even the chilly blasts of winter, are all vocal if we have but ears to hear what they say.

God also speaks to His children very loudly *by His providence*. Is there no voice in affliction? Has pain no tongue? Has the bed of languishing no eloquence? The Lord speaks to us sometimes by bereavement—when one after another has been taken away, God has spoken to us. The deaths of others are for our spiritual life—sharp physic for our soul’s health.

God has spoken to many a mother by the dear babe she has had to lay in the grave, and many a man has for the first time listened to God’s voice when he has heard the passing bell that spoke of the departure of one dearer to him than life itself. God speaks to us, if we will but hear, in all the arrangements of providence both pleasant and painful. Whether He caresses or chastises, there is a voice in all that He does. Oh, that we were not so deaf!

But the Lord speaks to us chiefly *through His Word*. Oh, what converse God has with His people when they are quietly reading their Bibles! There, in your still room, as you have been reading a chapter, have you not felt as if God spoke those words straight to your heart there and then? Has not Christ Himself said to you, while you have been reading His Word, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me”? The text does not seem to be like an old letter in a book, rather is it like a fresh speech newly spoken from the mouth of the Lord to you. It has been so, dear friends, has it not?

Then there is His Word as it is preached. It is delightful to notice how God speaks to the heart while the sermon is being heard—ay, and when the sermon is being read. I am almost every day made to sing inwardly as I hear of those to whom I have been the messenger of God. And my Lord has many messengers and He is speaking by them all.

There was one man, who had lived a life of drunkenness and unchastity, and had even shed human blood with his bowie knife or his revolver, yet he found the Savior and became a new man. And when he died, he charged one who was with him to tell me that my sermon had brought him to Christ. “I shall never tell him on earth,” he said, “but I shall tell the Lord Jesus Christ about him when I get to heaven.” It was by a sermon, read far away in the backwoods, that this great sinner was brought to Christ.

But it is not only in the backwoods that the Lord blesses the preached Word, it is here, it is everywhere where Christ is proclaimed. If we preach the Gospel, God gives a voice to it and speaks

through it. There is a kind of incarnation of the Spirit of God in every true preacher—God speaks through him. Oh, that men had but ears to hear!

But alas, alas! too often they hear as if it were of no importance. And the Lord has to say to His servant as He said to Ezekiel, “Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.” Oh, that each one of our hearers always came up to the sanctuary with this prayer in his heart, and on his lips, “Speak, Lord, by Your servant; speak right down into my soul.”

But the Lord has a way of sometimes speaking to the heart *by His Spirit*—I think not usually apart from His Word—but yet there are certain feelings and emotions, tenderness and tremblings, joys and delights, which we cannot quite link with any special portion of Scripture laid home to the heart, but which seem to steal upon us unawares by the direct operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart.

You who know the Lord must sometimes have felt a strange delight which had no earthly origin. You have, perhaps, awakened in the morning with it and it has remained with you. A little while after, you have had some severe trial, and you realize that the Lord had spoken to you to strengthen you to bear the affliction.

At other times you have felt great tenderness about some one individual and you have felt constrained to pray, and perhaps to go for some miles to speak a word to that individual, and it turned out that God meant to save that person through you, and He did so. I think we are not half as mindful as we ought to be of the secret working of the Holy Spirit upon the mind.

There are certain fanatics who get delirious and dream that they are prophets, and I know not what. But we just put them on one side. This is a very different thing from being guided by the Spirit of God in all the actions of life so as to obey the will of the Lord, sometimes in cases where we might not have known it to be His will or might have omitted it.

Whenever you feel moved to do anything that is good, do it. Do it even without being moved, because it is your duty, for “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” But above all, when there comes a gracious influence on the conscience—a gentle reminder to the heart—quickly and speedily do as the Spirit prompts, taking note within your heart that the Lord has laid this particular burden upon you and you must not cast it from you.

I should like to imitate one dear man of God with whom I sometimes commune. On one occasion he seemed to feel in his soul that he must go to a little port in France to deliver the Lord’s message, and as the boat went in, a person on the quay spoke to him and he said, “You are the one to whom I was sent.” Within a month, that godly man was in Russia, seeking the souls of others of whom he knew nothing. But God had guided him and they were brought to the Savior’s feet.

I know him as one who, I believe, lives so near to God that the Lord speaks to him otherwise than He does to the most of men, for all Christians are not alike favored in this respect. One may be a child of God, like Eli, and yet so live that God will not speak with Him. And on the other hand, one may be a child like Samuel—obedient, beautiful in character, and watchful to know God’s will, praying, “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth”—and then God will speak to you. It is not to all that He speaks, but He would speak to all if they were ready to learn what He had to say.

III. Now I must close with just a few words upon the last part of my subject, which is THE SOUL HEARING.

We have had the soul desiring and the Lord speaking—now for the soul hearing. “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.”

And first, I think we have here *an argument*. “Lord, do speak, for I do hear.” “There are none so deaf as those that will not hear,” so I fear that some people are very deaf indeed. But oh, when you feel, “Only let the Lord speak, I will hear—only let Him come to me and I will set the door wide open for Him to enter, glad if He, my gracious God, will come and be a sojourner with me”—He will come, He will speak to you. It is a good argument and you may use it if you can. God help you to do so!

Yet it appears to be *an inference* as well as an argument, for it seems to run like this, “Lord, if You speak, of course Your servant heareth.” Shall God speak and His servant not hear? God forbid! Strangers and sojourners may not listen, but His servant will. “Speak, Lord; for if You will but speak, I must hear. There is such a force about Your voice, such wisdom about what You say, that hear You I must and will.” It is an argument from God speaking, but it is also an inference from God speaking.

“Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth,” seems also to contain *a promise* within it, namely, that if the Lord will but speak, we will hear. I am afraid that, sometimes, we really do not listen to God. Suppose that we pray the Lord to speak to us, and when we have done praying we go away and engage in worldly conversation, this is surely not acting consistently.

I remember being asked to see a person and I thought that he wanted to learn something from me. But when I saw him for three-quarters of an hour, he spoke the whole time, and afterwards he told a friend that I was a most delightful person to converse with! When I was told that, I said, “Oh, yes, that was because I did not interrupt the man! He was wound up and I let him run down.”

But conversation means two people talking, does it not? It cannot be a conversation if I do all the talking, or if my friend does it all. So, in conversing with God, there must be, as we say, turn and turn about. You speak with God and then sit still—and let God speak with you. And if He does not at once speak to your heart, open His Book and read a few verses, and let Him speak to you that way.

Some people cannot pray when they wish to do so. I remember George Muller sweetly saying, “When you come to your time for devotion, if you cannot pray, do not try. If you cannot speak with God, do not try. Let God speak with you. Open your Bible and read a passage.” Sometimes, when you meet a friend, you cannot begin a conversation. Well then, let your friend begin it. Then you can reply to him and the conversation will go on merrily enough. So, if you cannot speak to God, let God speak to you.

It is also true communion with the Lord, sometimes, just to sit still, and look up, and say nothing, but just, “in solemn silence of the mind,” find your heaven and your God. “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. I have prayed to You, I have told You my grief, and now I am just sitting still to hear if You have anything to say to me. I am all ear and all heart. If You will command me, I will obey. If You will comfort me, I will believe. If You will reprove me, I will meekly bow my head. If You will give me the assurance of Your love, my heart shall dance at every sound of Your voice. Only speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.”

I have finished my discourse, but I do wish that some poor sinner here would say, before he goes away, “Lord, speak to *me*! Speak to my soul. Let this be the last night of my spiritual death and the birth-night of my spiritual life.” As for you who love the Lord, I am sure that you will pray this prayer and that you will keep on praying, “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.” And then what blessed conversations there will be between you and your Father in heaven!

The Lord bless you all, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 SAMUEL 3

Verse 1. *And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli.*

Samuel was but a child, yet he was a faithful servant of God up to the light he had received. The grown-up sons of Eli were rebelling against God, but “the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD.” It is a great aggravation of sin for ungodly men to persist in it when even little children rebuke them by their careful walk and conversation. It made the sin of Eli’s sons all the worse because “the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli”

1. *And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

God spoke with very few and His speech to them was private. “There was no open vision.” What was spoken was very rich and rare, but there was little of it. The Lord, in anger at the sin of Eli’s sons, took away the spirit of prophecy from the land.

2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

He was a good old man, but he was almost worn out and he had been unfaithful to God in not keeping his family right. He must have found some comfort in having such a sweet and dear companion and servant as little Samuel was.

3-5. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

Servants and children are to be attentive and obedient to the calls they hear, but masters must also be gentle, and kind, and considerate to them. Eli did not call the child a fool or speak harshly to him. He knew that Samuel had a good intention, and even if he had been mistaken and no one had called him, yet it was a good thing on the part of the child to act as if he had been spoken to. And Eli quietly and gently said, “I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.”

6. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me.

He felt sure of it, confident that he had not been mistaken.

6-7. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD,

There was the beginning of the work of grace in his heart, he was well-intentioned, but as yet God had not revealed Himself to him. “Samuel did not yet know the LORD,”

7-8. Neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time.

We do not blame Samuel, for he was but a child, and spiritual understanding had not yet fully come to him. But what shall I say of some to whom God has spoken for years till their hair is grey—and yet they have not understood the voice of the Lord even to this hour? I pray God that He may call them yet again. The Lord did not disdain to call Samuel four times, for when He means effectually to call, if one call is not sufficient, He will call again and again and again. “The LORD called Samuel again the third time.”

8-9. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

It was a chastisement to Eli that God did not speak directly to him, but sent him a message by another. And it must have been very humiliating to the aged man of God that God should select a little child to be His messenger to him. Yet, as Eli had not been faithful, it was great mercy on God’s part to speak to him at all.

And no doubt the old man did not resent the fact that God, instead of speaking to one of his sons, or to himself, spoke by this little child. Eli loved Samuel and finding that the Lord intended to use this child, he did not grow jealous and angry and begin to dampen the child’s spirit—he gave him wise directions how to act in case God should speak to him again.

10. And the LORD came, and stood,—

From which we learn that there was some kind of appearance to Samuel such as that which was manifested to others. Some spiritual Being was before him, though he could not make out the form thereof—“JEHOVAH came, and stood,”

10. And called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.

This time the child’s name was spoken twice, as though God would say to him, “I have called you by your name—you are Mine.” It was no doubt to make a deeper impression upon the child’s mind that his name was twice called by the Lord.

10. *Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

You observe that he did not say, “Lord.” Perhaps he hardly dared to take that sacred name upon his lips. He was impressed with such solemn awe at the name of God that he said, “Speak; for thy servant heareth.” I wish that some Christian men of my acquaintance would leave out the Lord’s name a little in their prayers, for we may take the name of the Lord in vain even in our supplications.

When the heathen are addressing their gods, they are accustomed to repeat their names over and over again. “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!” or as the Hindu do when they cry, “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!” repeating the name of their god. But as for us, when we think of the infinitely-glorious One, we dare not needlessly repeat His name.

11-13. *And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

What a striking expression—“the iniquity which he knoweth.” There is a good deal of iniquity about us which we do not know—that is a sin of ignorance. But deep down in his heart Eli knew that he had been afraid to speak to his sons about their sins, and that when he had spoken, it had been in such lenient terms that they made light of them.

Possibly he had never chastened them when they were young, and he had not spoken to them sharply when they were older. Remember that he was a judge—he was a high priest and he ought not to have allowed his sons to remain priests at all if they were behaving themselves filthily at the door of the tabernacle. He ought to have dealt with them as he would have dealt with anybody else, but he did not, so God said, “I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth.”

13. *Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

A man said to me, one day, “I never laid my hand upon my children,” and I answered, “Then I think it is very likely that God will lay His hand upon you.” “Oh!” he said, “I have not even spoken sharply to them.” “Then,” I replied, “it is highly probable that God will speak very sharply to you, for it is not God’s will that parents should leave their children unrestrained in their sin.”

14-15. *And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever. And Samuel lay until the morning,—*

I wonder whether he went to sleep? I should think not. After such visitation and revelation, it is a marvel that the child could lie still. One wonders that he did not go at once to Eli, but then the message was so heavy that he could not be in a hurry to deliver it. “And Samuel lay until the morning,”—

15. *And opened the doors of the house of the LORD.*

Dear child! There are some of us who, if God had spoken to us as He had spoken to Samuel, would feel a deal too big to go and open doors any more. If God were to come and speak to some who are poor, they would run away from their trade. If God were to speak to some who are young, they would give themselves mighty airs. But Samuel meekly accepted the high honor God had conferred upon him, and when he rose in the morning, he went about his usual duties. “He opened the doors of the house of the LORD.”

15. *And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.*

The old man must have felt that it was nothing very pleasant. Still, he wanted to know the Lord’s message. I hope he was in such a frame of mind that he could say, “Lord, show me the worst of my case! Let me know all Your mind about it and let me not go on with my eyes bandaged in ignorance of Your will concerning me.”

16-18. *Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.*

Samuel was obeying the divine command which had not then been given—“He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.”

18. *And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.*

This was a grand speech of old Eli. Terrible as it might be, he bowed his head to the divine sentence and owned that it was just.

19-21. *And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—711, 766, 192. (PART I)

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